New Orleans States-Item
FEB 19 1973

Hotel Sniper Tied to Dec. 31 Slaying
Accomplice Angle Still Up in Air

By ALLAN KATZ

A status report by the New Orleans Police Department on the sniper shootings here Dec. 31 and Jan. 7 says it has been proved conclusively the rifle recovered from the body of Mark Essex was used to kill [illegible] and wound 11 others.

The report, released by [illegible] Clarence B. Giarrusso at a press conference today, adds, "It has not definitely been determined if Essex did or did not have one or more accomplices at the time of the commission of the criminal acts committed on Dec. 31, 1972, and Jan. 7, 1973."

Police [illegible] Alfred Harrell [illegible] was shot to death Dec. 31; Deputy Chief of Police Louis Sirgo was [illegible] wounded along with five others in the Downtown Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge incident seven days later.

The status report said the evidence gathered to date "tends to give basis to the following conclusion:

"(1) Mark Essex could have acted alone in committing the criminal acts . . . if Essex had one or more accomplices on Dec. 31, 1972, they abandoned him before, during, or after the firing [illegible] Central Lockup; if he had one or more accomplices on Jan. 7, 1973, they exited from the motel."

"There is no substantial evidence [illegible] acts were a part of extension of revolutionary programs [illegible] by extremist groups; rather, the evidence indicates that he was either a self-revolutionist or that he was emulating what he thought to be the programs of revolutionary groups.

"(3) Essex' criminal acts — senseless murder and arson — were committed under cover of darkness, from concealed areas or by surprise. Five of the killings committed by Essex were on defenseless, unarmed persons, for example, the position in which Dr. (Robert) Stegall and his wife (killed Jan. 7 in the Howard Johnson's) were found — described as a 'death embrace' — indicates that Elizabeth Stegall was leaning over her mortally wounded husband when Essex shot her in the back of the head. Neither Robert nor Elizabeth Stegall had more than [illegible] neither had firearms for protection.

"(4) The number and location of [illegible] several levels of the motel, the killings committed on different levels, the snipings from various levels, all in combination, were sufficient to create a reasonable belief that there was more than one person involved in the acts of killing and arson on Jan. 7.

"Further, the firings and reports of police officers from various positions in combination with Essex' firing were reasonable basis to create the impression that there was more than one sniper involved. Following Mark Essex' slaying, it was determined that due caution be exercised to insure that further unnecessary killings be prevented."

The police report concludes that the .44 caliber Magnum rifle recovered near the body of Essex on the roof of the Downtown Howard Johnson's was the same weapon used to kill police officer Harrell and wound Lieut. Horace [illegible] in the Central Lockup New Year's Eve, and to wound Ptn. Edwin Hosli at the Burkart Manufacturing Co. warehouse, 1065 S. Gayoso, later that night.

The report indicates the same gun was used to shoot grocer Joe Perniciaro at his store at 1200 Erato St. about 10:15 a.m. Jan. 7, before the Howard Johnson's shootings began.

The police also believe it was Essex who fled to a church at 1208 S. Lopez after the Dec. 31 shootings. He was seen there by the minister and fled, leaving a not apologizing for his use of the church. According to police, handwriting experts have determined Essex wrote the note.

Essex earlier had cut himself in the warehouse, and blood found in the church matched Essex' type, according to the report.

THE POLICE say that Essex, after shooting Perniciaro on Jan. 7, had no prearranged escape plan and stole an automobile belonging to Marvin Albert. After striking a pedestrian at Washington Avenue and S. Dupre, he continued to the Howard Johnson's.

His conduct at the hotel, according to the report, convinced the police that he did not know the floor plan. For example, he had to ask hotel employes how to get from the parking garage, where he left the stolen auto, into the hotel.

Here is the text of the police report:

"On Jan. 7, 1973, at approximately 10:15 a.m., Essex entered Joe's Grocery, ordered the grocer (Joseph Perniciaro), 'You come here' and shot him with a .44-caliber magnum bullet.

"Essex, evidently having no pre-arranged escape plan, ran from the store to 1506 S. White st., where he observed a car owned and occupied by Marvin Albert, with the engine idling. He ordered Albert from the car, at rifle point, got into the car and proceeded in the direction of Meipomene and Broad streets.

Ptn. Phil Dominick was on the scene some two minutes after Albert's car was stolen. Albert got into the patrol car with Ptn. Dominick and pursued the car until they lost sight of the stolen vehicle at the above point.

At approximately 10:40 a.m., the stolen car driven by Essex was involved in a hit-and-run accident at the intersection of Washington Avenue and Dupre Street. The victim copied the license number of the car.

"Essex, in the stolen vehicle, was next observed by a witness entering, at a high rate of speed, the parking garage of the Down Town Howard Johnson. Next he was observed in the vicinity of the fourth floor of the garage by other persons as he abandoned the car, and entered the south or Gravier Street stairwell of the motel. Doors to the stairwell, with exception of those for the parking levels, normally could be opened from the outside only.

"Essex asked two employes on the eighth floor to let him in the room accommodations part of the motel. They refused his request and observed him running up the stairs. He was next observed in the stairwell on the ninth floor where he asked an employe on duty to let him in, and again his request was refused. Essex then proceeded to the 18th floor and gained entrance to the room accommodations section.

"Upon gaining entrance to the 18th-floor level, it is assumed Essex attempted to start a fire and that Dr. Robert Stegall, a guest of the motel, observed Essex's arson attempt and intervened. A struggle between Essex and Dr. Stegall followed and Essex shot Dr. Stegall through the heart with a .44 caliber magnum bullet. Elizabeth Stegall, wife of Robert Stegall, while cradling her fatally wounded husband, was executed by Essex when he placed the barrel of the rifle near the back of her head. The autopsy report conclusively shows that Elizabeth and Robert Stegall were individually killed. Essex either lost or intentionally letf a red, green and black flag near the bodies of the Stegalls.

"Essex was next reported on the 11th floor. He gained entrance by blasting the lock off the door leading to that level and attempted to set fires on this level.

"Frank Schneider, assistant manager of the motel, who had gone to the 11th floor to investigate reports that a man with a gun was on that level, was shot in the back of the head by Essex with a .44-caliber magnum bullet.

"Essex then proceeded to the 10th floor and was met by Walter Collins, manager of the motel, who also had gone to investigate reports of a man with a gun. Collins was shot by Essex with a .44-caliber magnum bullet and succumbed from this inflicted wound on Jan. 26, 1973.

Essex then went onto the roof of the eighth-floor meeting room and then to the eighth-floor patio area. Here he shot Robert Beamish with a .44-caliber magnum bullet, and began systematically to set fires to rooms on that floor level. From this level, he shot and wounded Fire Lt. Tim Ursin, Ptn. Charles Arnold, Ptn. Kenneth Solis, Sgt. Emanuel Palmisano and fatally wounded Ptn. Phil Coleman.

In an attempt to escape from the motel, Essex returned to the fourth-floor parking garage level, where he had abandoned the stolen vehicle. Police officers were [illegible] area of the vehicle. Essex [illegible] shot through the glass section [illegible] fourth-street level door and went back up the stairwell.

"Essex was next observed on the 16th floor level of the motel. From this level, he shot and killed Ptn. Paul Persigo, wounded Joe Anderson and Chris Caton. He also set fires on this level.

"Essex was next observed on the 17th floor level where he continued to systematically set fires in guest rooms and the corridor. He entered the Perdido Street stairwell and attempted to reach the roof level. Deputy Chief Louis Sirgo, leading a search party for the sniper or snipers and attempting to rescue two policemen who were trapped in an elevator on the 18th floor level, was shot in the back and killed in the stairwell between the 15th and 16th floors."

Continued from Front Page

Turn to Page 3, Column 1